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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006728

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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH TO APPOINT NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: A. AMMAN 06491

[B.](#) AMMAN 06281

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Abul Ragheb told the Ambassador today that he will submit his resignation to the King on October

[¶](#)22. Embassy sources and the press report that King Abdullah will appoint Royal Court Minister Faisal Fayed as the new PM.

The King intends to meet with prospective members of a reshuffled Cabinet at a closed two-day summit where he will outline his agenda for a new government, including an emphasis on political reforms. While Fayed is generally liked, there is widespread doubt whether he has the experience and character to reform government institutions and move measures through Parliament. This may signal that the King plans to take an active role in governance and in pushing through his priorities. End Summary.

THE CAT'S OUT OF THE BAG

[¶](#)2. (C) Amidst increasing rumors about a government shake-up, Palace sources disclosed publicly October 20 that Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb will very shortly resign and that King Abdullah will accept his resignation. The Prime Minister confirmed to the Ambassador October 21 that he would submit his resignation within 24 hours. An unnamed official in the Royal Court told the press that Royal Court Minister Faisal Fayed would succeed Abul Ragheb as PM and head a new government that will "speed up the implementation of His Majesty King Abdullah's vision of modernization and reform." Emphasizing that new ministers would not be chosen on the basis of geographic or tribal roots, the Royal Court source was quoted as saying, "Ministers of the new Cabinet will be selected for their skills and capabilities to carry out political, economic and social reforms in line with the King's plan for a better Jordan."

[¶](#)3. (U) The local press further announced that the number of Cabinet ministers will be reduced from 29 to around 20, with the Ministry of Information being scrapped and a new Ministry for Political Development added. Public reports also stated that King Abdullah would soon meet with the new Cabinet, to include women and more young technocrats, at a two-day retreat in Aqaba to discuss objectives and draft a government program.

WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT

[¶](#)4. (C) Press accounts on the formation of a new government are generally in line with what we've been hearing. Abul Ragheb is holding a final meeting of the current Cabinet on October 21. Embassy sources indicate that the King will host prospective Cabinet ministers at his Aqaba Palace on October 22-23 to gauge their commitment to his reform agenda and ability to work together, although it is not yet clear when their names will be made public. We've been told that the expected Cabinet will be "half liberal," including as many as three women, and that the other half was "not too conservative."

[¶](#)5. (C) Despite the shake-up, we believe that many of the more liberal-minded members of the current Cabinet will remain. Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher is expected to stay and may be promoted to Deputy Prime Minister. We believe that many of the progressive economic ministers will also make the cut, including Minister of Planning Bassam Awadallah who we are told will be given "expanded responsibilities," which may include the Trade and Industry portfolio and a Deputy Prime Minister title. Telecom Minister Fawaz Zubi will retain his job, as will Education Minister Khalid Touqan and Water Minister Nazem Nasser. We understand that Finance Minister Michel Marto may be moved to head the Central Bank of Jordan, to be replaced by his former Number 2, Mohammad Abu Hammour, who has been Minister of Industry and Trade since June. The fate of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mohammad Halaika, one of the main architects of Jordan's economic reforms, is unclear, though he likely will

remain in the government.

DEMOCRACY TO THE FOREFRONT?

16. (C) Our interlocutors say that one of the King's top priorities for the new government will be a political reform agenda "heavy on human rights, democracy and pluralism," along with a continued emphasis on ongoing economic modernization. According to a Cabinet source, the King is proud of the results of his economic reform efforts and has decided that now is the time to match this progress in the political arena. This would include a stepped up effort to formally ratify in Parliament and implement international human rights conventions signed by previous governments. Reports of a new Ministry for Political Development indicate that the King will devote new resources to his vision of a more open political system with active political parties (see ref b).

IS FAYEZ THE MAN FOR THE JOB?

17. (U) Faisal Fayed, 51 years old, was most recently appointed Minister of the Royal Court in March 2003. Prior to that, he served as Chief of Protocol for the Palace. Fayed is an alumni of the U.S. International Visitor program and obtained a degree in International Relations from Boston University. He is from the prominent Bani Sakhr tribe, which traditionally has had close ties to the royal Hashemite family.

18. (C) While Abul Ragheb has been accused of corruption and disparaged by some members of Parliament (see ref a), Fayed is well-liked with no major political liabilities. Yet he does not have substantive experience in government office and lacks real influence outside of his tribe. Moreover, he is not seen as a strong leader or as having the necessary "drive" to reform government institutions and push more controversial measures through Parliament. Although a loyal servant of the King, he is not the strong reformer you might expect to lead a liberalizing government.

COMMENT

19. (C) Early public reaction to the news of Abul Ragheb's departure has been positive. Similarly, the new emphasis on human rights and democracy should be generally welcomed both within and outside the Kingdom as a positive change, although it may cause discomfort for some entrenched interests. By selecting Fayed to head his new government, the King has apparently decided to opt for a non-controversial figure who enjoys his close trust over a more experienced, but controversial, candidate with a wider political base. Unless Fayed exceeds very modest initial expectations, we expect that the King plans to remain very engaged in day to day governance if he wishes to implement his reform agenda.

10. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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